

In 1690 Tourville gained at Beachy Head ⁱ the most conspicuous single success the French had ever gained over the English ^j, but used it only to make fruitless demonstrations against the south coast. In 1692, the definite plan of Louis XIV for the invasion of England was defeated at La Hogue, the last general action fought by the French fleet during the war. After that the French navy seemed to dwindle away, but its decay ^k was not due to any one defeat, but to the exhaustion of France and the great cost of the continental war/¹ The expense of the continental war prevented Louis from maintaining great French fleets at sea. Instead the French devoted their energies to privateering and commerce destroying. They sent out small squadrons of cruisers or privateers and caused great loss to English trade, but did not dispute the command of the seas. Meanwhile the sea power of the English and Dutch brought a quiet, steady pressure to bear upon France and maintained it in all quarters. As the war went on and as the administration of the navy improved in efficiency commerce destroying was brought within bounds. ^l The cruisers were more and more controlled as the great French fleets disappeared.^{7 2}

To sum up, the French were stronger than the English and Dutch at the beginning of the war, but they mis-directed their naval superiority, and lost it. At

the beginning
ning of the war, it was ' possible, as it will
usually be
possible, for a really fine military navy of
superior force to
strike an overwhelming blow at a less ready
rival; but the
opportunity was allowed to slip, and the
essentially
stronger, better founded sea power of the allies
had time to
assert itself/ ³

¹ Ibid. p. 191.

² Ibid, p. 196.

³ Ibid. p. 197.